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ABSTRACT

One of eight papers from Project Seed, this paper discusses an 8-week program on conflict resolution used among fourth- through sixth-graders at one school. The program described could easily be implemented in other schools. Through the program, students are trained in a step-by-step mediation process; those students who become Classroom Mediators demonstrate their skill by role-playing a real life situation that needs conflict resolution. It is noted that Classroom Mediators then work in pairs to help mediate situations in both the playground and the classroom. The paper describes the student participants in the program and lists seven basic program goals: (1) to resolve peer disputes that interfere with the education process; (2) to build a stronger sense of cooperation in the classroom; (3) to improve the school environment by decreasing tension and violence; (4) to increase student participation and leadership skills; (5) to develop practical life skills; (6) to improve student-student and student-teacher relationships; and (7) to build self-esteem. Anticipated outcomes of the program are discussed. Procedures and instructions for the program are provided in 10 steps; the duration of the program is described; materials and facilities needed are given; and a bibliography of seven relevant publications is included. The program cost is estimated to be approximately $200-$300 for materials in the first year. (NB)

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# "STUDENTS AS MEDIATORS"

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# STUDENTS AS MEDIATORS

Utilizing classroom lessons in conflict resolution, students are trained through a step by step process in the art of mediation. Students who choose to go on and become Classroom Mediators must demonstrate their skill by role-playing a real life situation that needs conflict resolution. Classroom Mediators are then used in pairs to help mediate situations that arise in both the playground and classroom.

## PARTICIPANTS

All students at Webster School (grades 4-6 ) participated in an 8 week program on Conflict Resolution. This program was the foundation for a better understanding in the skills of peacemaking. Resolving conflicts in nonviolent ways was emphasized. The process of mediation was taught in the sixth grade. This process involves resolving disputes and conflicts with the help of a neutral third party. Mediation allows disputing parties to bring their problem to the mediation table in order to work out their differences constructively.

Students were used as mediators because they speak the same language and share common concerns. A student mediation program sends a clear message, "attack the problem not the person". Provide students with a place to talk over their grievances and they will find a workable solution.

Mediators can be utilized in a wide variety of situations including; on the playground, in the classrooms, and during after school activities. Utilizing mediators empowers the students to solve their own conflicts and allows the teachers more time to teach.

## PROGRAM GOALS

1. To resolve peer disputes that interfere with the education process.

2. To build a stronger sense of cooperation in the classroom.

3. To improve the school environment by decreasing tension and violence.

4. To increase student participation and leadership skills.

5. To develop practical life skills.

6. To improve student-student and student-teacher relationships.

7. To build self-esteem.

## OUTCOMES

Reduction in violent responses by students in conflict situations. An increase in alternative "peaceful" responses to conflict. An acceptance of mediation as an effective process for kids and teachers to use. An increase in self-esteem of the mediators as they help to facilitate successful conflict resolution. A reduction in teacher time needed to resolve simple disputes.

## PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS

1. Establish faculty, administrative, and parental support for the program. Even though you may only be using this in your classroom, it is important to educate all people involved with the students to the purpose of mediation.

2. Review your current building policy on discipline and decide which situations are or are not appropriate for mediation.

3. Begin 8 week training session in classroom(s) around Conflict Resolution and Mediation utilizing Peaceworks materials. (see bibliography).

4. Ask for student volunteers to become Classroom Mediators. Have them do a role-play situation to demonstrate mediation skills.

5. Give mediation certificates for students able to demonstrate skills.

6. Establish specific guidelines for situations that can utilize student mediators.

7. Provide a quiet space available with a table and four chairs for mediation sessions.

8. Provide a sign-up sheet to rotate mediators on a daily basis.

9. Keep Mediator Report Forms and Tally Sheets on file so the program can be evaluated.

10. Meet with the student mediators once-a-week to check on progress and "trouble-shoot difficult situations. Ask for feedback from staff on the progress of the program.

## DURATION

The classroom training should be done once or twice a week over eight weeks or more ideally once a day over two weeks. When mediators have received their certificates mediation can take place for the rest of the year.

## MATERIALS AND FACILITIES

Mediation can take place on the playground, right outside the classroom, or in a small corner in the classroom. Certificates, Mediation Report Forms, Tally Forms are all included in the Mediation For Kids book listed in the bibliography.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Peace Education Foundation, Inc. P.O. Box 191153 Miami Beach, Florida 33119 (305) 576-5075 (has the following books available:

PEACEMAKING FOR LITTLE KIDS (k-2)

CREATIVE CONFLICT SOLVING FOR KIDS (3-4), (5-9)

FIGHTING FAIR (4-9)

MEDIATION FOR KIDS (5-12)

FIGHTING FAIR FOR FAMILIES

Naomi Drew , LEARNING THE SKILLS OF PEACEMAKING

William Kreidler, CREATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## PROJECT COST

The school should budget between $200-300 for materials for the first year. More would be expected if you had a Mediation Coordinator as a stipend position.

## CONCLUSION

A meaningful conflict resolution program exists in a nurturing and cooperative environment. The classroom teacher is the best resource to teach conflict resolution skills, because he/she has the opportunity to reinforce them in everyday situations. These skills include verbal/nonverbal communication, listening, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, negotiation and mediation.

Students have the opportunity to explore conflict from many different perspectives. Only when students see connections to their own lives, then will students be able to look beyond and develop a way of thinking that helps build peaceful relationships in their world. Conflict resolution skills are probably one of the most valuable life skills for helping kids become responsible members of their communities.